

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 CCO-00 INRE-00 DODE-00

CIAE-00 /026 W
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O R 021845Z JUN 75
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 6907
USDEL SALZBURG NIACT IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO NIACT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONGEN JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 3377

EXDIS

(C O R R E C T E D C O P Y ((TAGS, E O, AND SUBJECT LINES
ADDED TO TEXT)

E O 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, MOPS, IS, EG
SUBJECT: ISRAELI "GESTURE" IN SINAI

1. FOLLOWING ARE OUR PRELIMINARY COMMENTS ON GOI DECISION TO MAKE
GESTURE IN SINAI WHICH WAS TAKEN AT SPECIAL CABINET MEETING HELD
THIS MORNING. RE TIMING, THIS WAS FIRST OPPORTUNITY FOR SUCH A
MEETING FOLLOWING FOREIGN MINISTER ALLON'S RETURN LAST NIGHT FROM
ROMANIA. AFFIRMATIVE DECISION RE GESTURE IN SUCH DRAMATIC FASHION
TOOK US ALL BY SURPRISE. IT HAS BEEN COMMON KNOWLEDGE THAT SOME
SUCH GESTURE HAS BEEN UNDER PERIODIC CONSIDERATION BY CABINET EVER
SINCE SADAT'S ANNOUNCEMENT TO REOPEN CANAL WHICH WAS RECOGNIZED
HERE, INTER ALIA, AS GREAT PROPAGANDA VICTORY FOR HIM. FOR VARIETY
OF REASONS, INCLUDING REPORTED OPPOSITION (LIKUD LEADER BEGIN HAS
SAID HE SAW "NO POLITICAL WISDOM" IN SUCH GESTURE), IT GENERALLY
ASSUMED BY OBSERVERS AND POLITICAL PUNDITS IN MEDIA THAT MATTER
HAD BEEN DROPPED.
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2. WE CAN ONLY SPECULATE AS TO GOI MOTIVATION FOR MAKING MOVE AT
THIS TIME.

(1) RABIN PERSONALLY MIGHT HAVE BELIEVED THAT HE HAD TO RESPOND
IN SOME MANNER TO DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE RE ISRAELI

"INFLEXIBILITY." HE WOULD HOPE TO REAP CONSIDERABLE PROPAGANDA BENEFITS AT MINIMAL DOMESTIC COST. WE NOTE THAT IN Q'S AND A'S AFTER HIS ANNOUNCEMENT, RABIN AT LEAST TWICE USED LANGUAGE TO EFFECT THAT MOVE WAS TO PROVE ISRAEL WILLING TO "TAKE RISKS" IN HOPES OF REDUCING TENSION IN AREA.

(2) MFA SOURCE INDICATED THAT DEFMIN PERES WAS THE, OR A, PRIME MOVER BEHIND CABINET DECISION. WE NOTE THAT DAYAN HAS AT LEAST TWICE IN RECENT WEEKS CALLED FOR ALMOST PRECISELY WHAT CABINET HAS DECIDED IN CONJUNCTION WITH OPENING OF CANAL.

(3) ISRAELIS MAY BELIEVE THAT ANNOUNCEMENT OF PULL BACK ON THEIR PART WOULD SERVE TO "PRE-EMPT" AND "PREVENT" ANY POSSIBLE LARGE-SCALE EGYPTIAN MOVEMENT TO EAST BANK. WE DOUBT ISRAELIS WERE AS CONCERNED ABOUT THIS POSSIBILITY AS THEY PROFESSED TO BE. NEVERTHELESS, IN THE FUNNY WORLD WE LIVE IN HERE, ISRAELIS COULD WELL CLAIM IN FUTURE THAT THEIR "PEACEFUL" MOVE ACTUALLY FORESTALLED "WAR-LIKE" EGYPTIAN VIOLATION OF AGREEMENT.

(4) TIMING OF GESTURE OBVIOUSLY DESIGNED TO HELP STEAL HEADLINES AWAY FROM SADAT/FORD MEETING WITH ITS EMPHASIS ON NEED TO CONTINUE MOMENTUM IN THE MID EAST, WHICH ISRAELIS FREELY INTERPRET AS IMPLIED THREAT OF U.S. PRESSURE TO FORCE UNILATERAL ISRAELI CONCESSIONS. ALSO, DESPITE RABIN'S COMMENTS TO CONTRARY TO PRESS, GOI HAD HOPES OF HAVING SOME KIND OF IMPACT ON ISSUE OF FORD/SADAT MEETING; AT BEST, THIS COULD BE GREATER WILLINGNESS ON PART OF SADAT TO OFFER "CONCESSIONS" TO ISRAEL IN VIEW OF FORTHCOMING RABIN/FORD MEETING. AT WORST, ISRAELI MOVE COULD CREATE CERTAIN CONFUSION AT SALZBURG WHICH MIGHT SERVE TO KEEP EGYPTIANS AND AMERICANS OFF-BALANCE AS WE LOOK TOWARD RABIN MEETING IN WASHINGTON.

(5) VESTURE COULD ALSO BE DESIGNED IN PART TO ANSWER DOMESTIC CRITICS RE SPECIFIC CHARGE OF FAILURE OF GOI TO COME UP WITH ANYTHING "NEW" PRIOR TO MEETING WITH PRESIDENT FORD.

(6) FINALLY, IT IS BARELY POSSIBLE THAT TIMING OF DECISION MIGHT
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REFLECT SOME SENSITIVITY IN JERUSALEM OVER PRESS REPORTS (AND PRE-SUMABLY REPORTS FROM ISRAELI EMBASSY) FROM WASHINGTON OF CONCERN EXPRESSED BY AT LEAST SOME OF THE 76 SENATORS THAT GOI WAS INTERPRETING LETTER AS SUPPORT FOR ISRAELI INFLEXIBILITY.

3. OUR INITIAL READING OF THE MILITARY SIGNIFICANCE OF GOI STEPS IS THAT THEY WILL NOT SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE ISRAELI MILITARY CAPACITY TO DEFEND SINAI PASSES. THERE ARE VERY FEW TANKS AT PRESENT IN THE FORWARD AREA. REDUCTION BY HALF MAY NOT INVOLVE ACTUAL PULL BACK OF MANY TANKS. REMOVAL OF ARTILLARY FROM 32 KM RANGE MAY NOT ACTUALLY INVOLVE MOVEMENT OF ANY UNITS, BUT WOULD PROMISE THAT NO TUBES WILL BE IN NOMINAL RANGE OF CANAL SHIPPING. IDF HAS NEVER HAD 50 PERCENT OF FORCES AUTHORIZED IN LIMITED ARMAMENTS AREA, SO, THIS IS SYMBOLIC RATHER THAN REAL REDUCTION. PULL BACK OF MISSILES MAY BE OF GREATER

SIGNIFICANCE BUT WE ARE UNABLE AT THIS POINT TO COMMENT.

4. WHATEVER GOI MOTIVATIONS MIGHT HAVE BEEN, OBVIOUSLY SUCH AN ISRAELI GESTURE AT THIS TIME IS A POSITIVE MOVE WHICH THEY HOPE WILL IMPROVE POSSIBILITIES FOR RENEWED NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND EGYPT. MAJOR PROBLEM AS WE SEE IT IS THAT ISRAELIS MAY CONVINC THEMSELVES THAT THERE IS MORE REAL SUBSTANCE TO THEIR GESTURE THAN MAY EITHER BE WARRANTED OR IS PERCEIVED BY EGYPTIANS. AS RESULT, THEY MIGHT BE EXPECTING TOO MUCH IN RETURN FROM SADAT. IF THIS PROVES TO BE THE CASE, ISRAELIS MIGHT VERY WELL FEEL THAT LACK OF CONCILIATORY RESPONSE WILL SERVE TO STILL THEIR DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN CRITICS AND JUSTIFY ISRAELI RELUCTANCE TO MAKE ANY ADDITIONAL "UNILATERAL" GESTURES TO EGYPTIANS.

5. IN THIS RESPECT, EVRON (MFA) IN REACTING TO SOME INITIAL SPECULATION IN PRESS CIRCLES RE FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS "UNILATERAL" GOI ACTION, MADE CLEAR THAT ISRAELI GESTURE SHOULD NOT BE SEEN AS ANY GOI WILLINGNESS WHATSOEVER TO UNILATERALLY GIVE UP TERRITORY IN SINAI WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT EGYPTIAN QUID PRO QUO. VELIOTES

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 26 AUG 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: GOVERNMENT REACTIONS, MILITARY PLANS, SUEZ CANAL, TROOP REDUCTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 02 JUN 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975TELAV03377
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: n/a
Film Number: D750193-0275
From: TEL AVIV
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750699/baaaaeta.tel
Line Count: 131
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 02 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <02 APR 2003 by ElyME>; APPROVED <07 APR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CORRECTED> wfs 971006
Subject: n/a
TAGS: MOPS, PFOR, EG, IS
To: STATE NIACT
SALZBURG NIACT INFO CAIRO NIACT
AMMAN
BEIRUT
DAMASCUS
AMCONGEN JERUSALEM

Type: TE

Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006